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STAN LEE PRESENTS:

PATCHED WOUNDS

SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I'M IN THE RIGHT BUSINESS.
THERE'S JUST NO SENSE OF *LOYALTY* ANYMORE. WE'RE *ALL* CROOKS-- I KNOW THAT BETTER THAN ANYONE-- BUT THERE'RE SOME THINGS YOU JUST *DON'T* DO.
STORY AND ART BY
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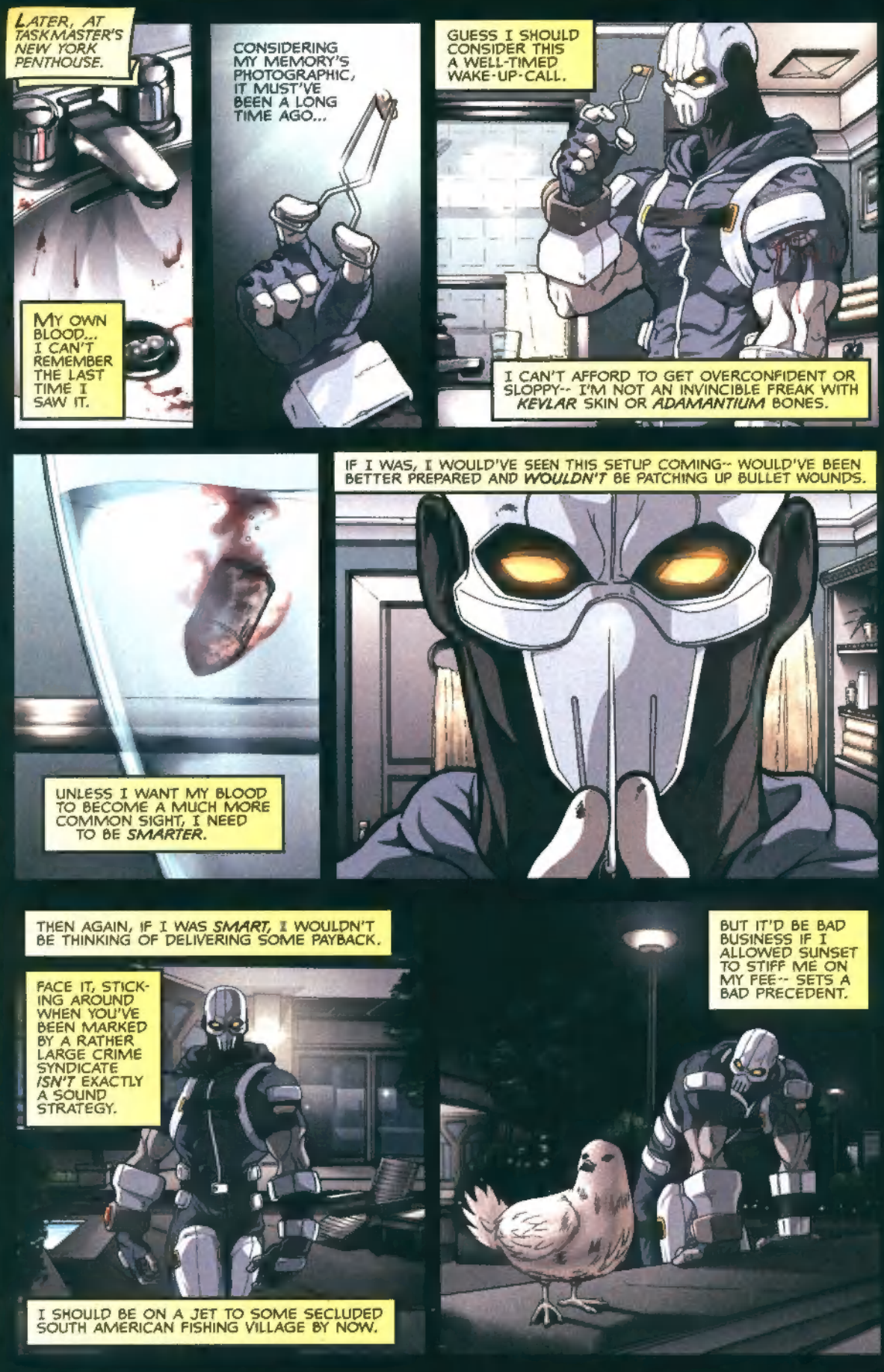
SUNSET BAIN, SOME UPPITY MOVER-AND-SHAKER IN THE WORLDS OF TECHNOLOGY, CALLS ME IN FOR A JOB. I'VE NEVER WORKED FOR HER BEFORE, BUT I WENT OUT ON A LIMB AND GAVE HER THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT ANYWAY. AFTER ALL, IT COULD'VE BEEN THE START OF A BEAUTIFUL, *LUCRATIVE* BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP.
SO I INFILTRATED A TOP-LEVEL SECURITY *STARK LAB*, SABOTAGED IT *EXACTLY* AS I WAS SUPPOSED TO, AND EVEN DEALT WITH AN UNEXPECTED RUN-IN WITH *IRON MAN!* BUT WHEN IT'S TIME TO PAY THE TAB, SHE LETS HER PET POLICEMEN LOOSE ON ME AND TURNS EVERYTHING INTO A *BLOODY MESS*.
FORTUNATELY, I HAVE A LITTLE SOMETHING I CALL *PHOTOGRAPHIC REFLEXES*-- A SKILL THAT ALLOWS ME TO LEARN AND REPRODUCE ACTIONS I SEE AS IF THEY WERE MY OWN. GETTING OUT OF THIS DINER MIGHT BE *DIFFICULT*, BUT IT WON'T BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH THE REPERTOIRE OF SKILLS I'VE GLEANED FROM WATCHING THE LIKES OF THE PUNISHER, ELEKTRA...

...AND HOURS UPON HOURS OF HONG KONG CINEMA.
NOW IF ONLY I HAD SOME DOVES AND A SLO-MO BUTTON...
KA-CHAK
KA-CHAK
KA-CHAK
KA-CHAK
LET'S MOVE. WATCH YOUR BACK, THIS GUY'S A PRO.

SLAM!
ARRRGH!
AAAHHH!
SKLURTCHHH!
BRATTATATTATATT!
EXIT
VVMMMMMMMM
BRATATTATATT!
BRATTATATTATATT!

SkRASH!
TEAR GAS? CUTE.
WE'RE IN.
CAREFUL, PEOPLE, WE ALREADY HAVE MEN DOWN...
...I DON'T WANT ANY MORE CASUALTIES.
!
THE GAS LINE!
SSSHHHHHHHHHH
CLEAR OUT! NOW!!
00:05

=HEFF=
=A-KUNFF!=
=HUNNH!=
BA-DOOM!
TWHIP!
SPIDER-MAN... I OWE YOU ONE.


LATER, AT TASKMASTER'S NEW YORK PENTHOUSE.
MY OWN BLOOD... I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME I SAW IT.
CONSIDERING MY MEMORY'S PHOTOGRAPHIC, IT MUST'VE BEEN A LONG TIME AGO...
GUESS I SHOULD CONSIDER THIS A WELL-TIMED WAKE-UP-CALL.
I CAN'T AFFORD TO GET OVERCONFIDENT OR SLOPPY-- I'M NOT AN INVINCIBLE FREAK WITH KEVLAR SKIN OR ADAMANTIUM BONES.
UNLESS I WANT MY BLOOD TO BECOME A MUCH MORE COMMON SIGHT, I NEED TO BE SMARTER.
IF I WAS, I WOULD'VE SEEN THIS SETUP COMING-- WOULD'VE BEEN BETTER PREPARED AND WOULDN'T BE PATCHING UP BULLET WOUNDS.
THEN AGAIN, IF I WAS SMART, I WOULDN'T BE THINKING OF DELIVERING SOME PAYBACK.
FACE IT, STICKING AROUND WHEN YOU'VE BEEN MARKED BY A RATHER LARGE CRIME SYNDICATE ISN'T EXACTLY A SOUND STRATEGY.
I SHOULD BE ON A JET TO SOME SECLUDED SOUTH AMERICAN FISHING VILLAGE BY NOW.
BUT IT'D BE BAD BUSINESS IF I ALLOWED SUNSET TO STIFF ME ON MY FEE-- SETS A BAD PRECEDENT.

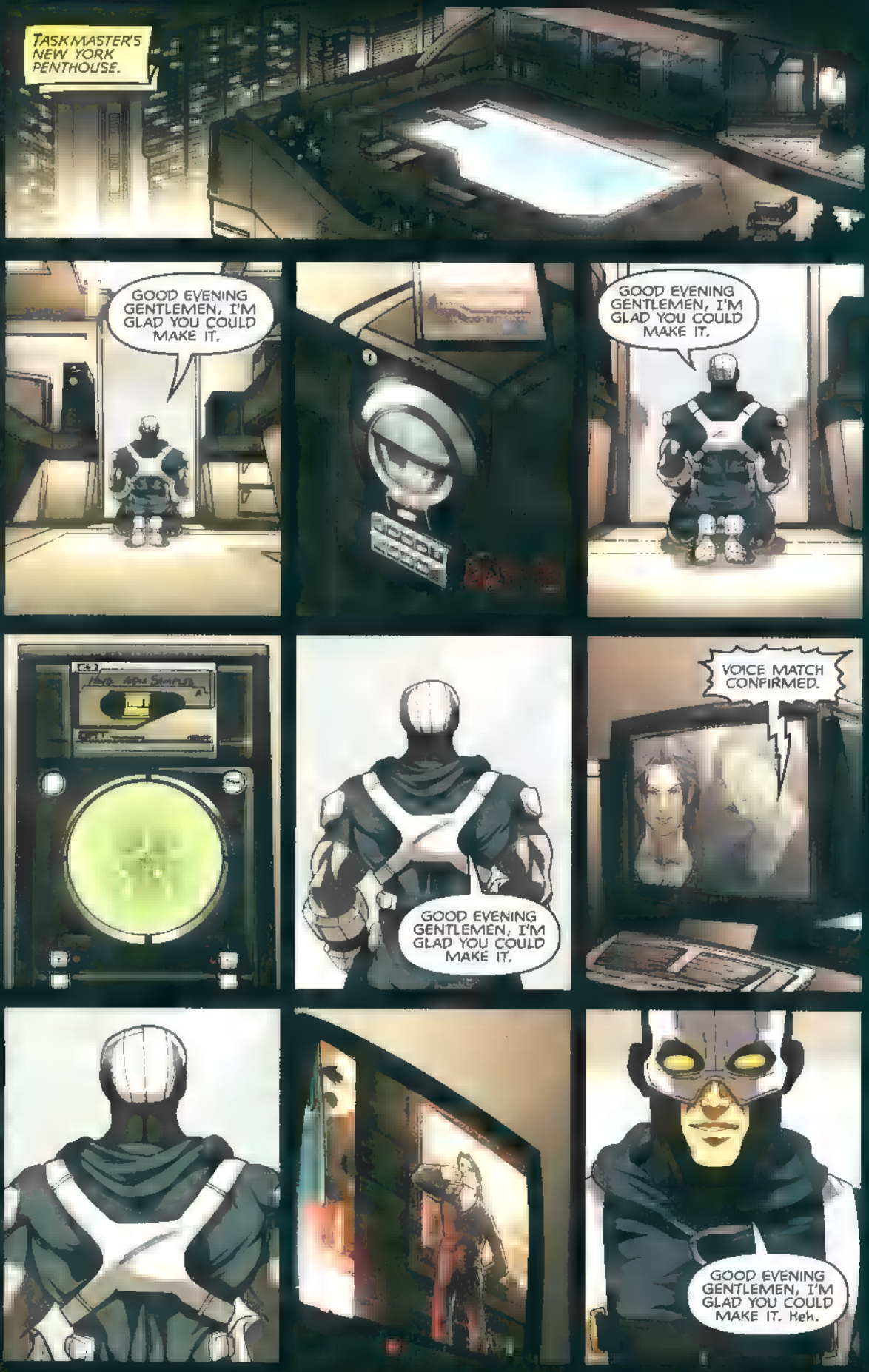
LIKE IT OR NOT, I'LL GET MY MILLION.
GUESS I AIN'T TOO SMART.
THE NEXT DAY.
DAMN BIRDS!
THINK THEY GOT A THING FOR YOUR SHOULDER!
YOU'RE TELLIN' ME! OTHER DAY I WAS WALKIN' MY BEAT OUT EAST AN' A DAMN FLEET A THESE FLYIN' RATS CARPET BOMBED ME! I LOOKED LIKE A DAMN DALMATION BY THE TIME THOSE FEATHERED @#$*S WERE DONE.
Heh, NEXT TIME BRING AN UMBRELLA!
FUNNY, VERY FUNNY. ANYWAYS, GOTTA GO GET SOME FILES FROM THE RECORDS DEPARTMENT. LATER.
TEN MINUTES LATER.
I'D NEED A TRUCK TO HAUL ALL OF THE FILES THE POLICE HAVE ON BAIN AND THE TRIADS, BUT THIS BOX-FUL SHOULD BE ENOUGH FOR MY PURPOSES...

GOOD MORNING.
THANKS FOR LETTING ME BORROW YOUR FACE-- AND YOUR BADGE-- Mr. OFFICER. JUST THOUGHT I'D RETURN THEM.
=MMMGHMFF!=
DON'T WORRY, I PARKED VERY ILLEGALLY SO A METER MAID SHOULD PICK YOU UP IN NO TIME.
AND BY THE WAY, WHEN YOU GET BACK TO YOUR CHIEF, YOU MIGHT WANT TO WARN HIM TO KEEP YOUR DEPARTMENT ON THEIR TOES.
NO PARKING
THEY'RE GOING TO BE SEEING A LOT OF ACTION, SOON.
POLIC
NO PARKING
POLICE
UCS

I'M ABOUT TO START A WAR.
AFTER I USE THE TRIADS TO STEAL MY MILLION FOR ME, THERE'S NO DOUBT SUNSET WILL RETALIATE.
THEN THE TRIADS WILL RETALIATE, THEN SHE, THEN THEY, THEN SHE, AND SO ON...
Heh. SHOULD BE PRETTY ENTERTAINING.
PERHAPS I'D FEEL SORRY FOR WHAT I'M ABOUT TO DO TO THE TRIADS IF THEY WERE WORTHY OF SOME PITY. BUT THEY WON'T GET ANY FROM ME.
THEY'RE SLOPPY, THEY'RE ARROGANT, THEY THINK THEY'RE UNTOUCHABLE--
--THIS LESSON IS LONG OVERDUE.

AND HERE COMES LUCKY PUPIL NUMBER ONE.
THAT'S *HONG*, UNDER *LO*, THE HEAD ELDERLY GODFATHER-TYPE, HONG'S FIRST ■ THE CHAIN OF COMMAND. HE HANDLES MOST OF THE DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS.
HE SHOULD BE *MOST* USEFUL TO ME ONCE I 'GET' HIM DOWN.
USING THE RECORDING EQUIPMENT INTEGRATED INTO MY MASK, I'LL DOCUMENT THE WAY HE WALKS, THE WAY HE TALKS...
EVEN THE WAY HE SMOKES.
A DISGUST-ING HABIT.
ALL THAT'S LEFT IS TO GET A FEW CLEAR SAMPLES OF HIS VOICE.

Ah, RIGHT THERE, THAT'S IT.
YOU SEEM TENSE.
BEEN UNDER A LOT OF STRESS LATELY.
YOU'VE BEEN AWAY TOO LONG. YOU KNOW RELIEVING YOUR STRESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY SPECIALTY.
PLEASE EXCUSE ME FOR A MOMENT.
1
BLIP
1
WHAT A CHUMP.


TASKMASTER'S NEW YORK PENTHOUSE.
GOOD EVENING GENTLEMEN, I'M GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT.
GOOD EVENING GENTLEMEN, I'M GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT.
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VOICE MATCH CONFIRMED.
GOOD EVENING GENTLEMEN, I'M GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT. Heh.

GOTCHA.
LATER, AT HONG'S APARTMENT.
THAT SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO KEEP HIM OUT OF COMMISSION UNTIL THIS IS OVER.

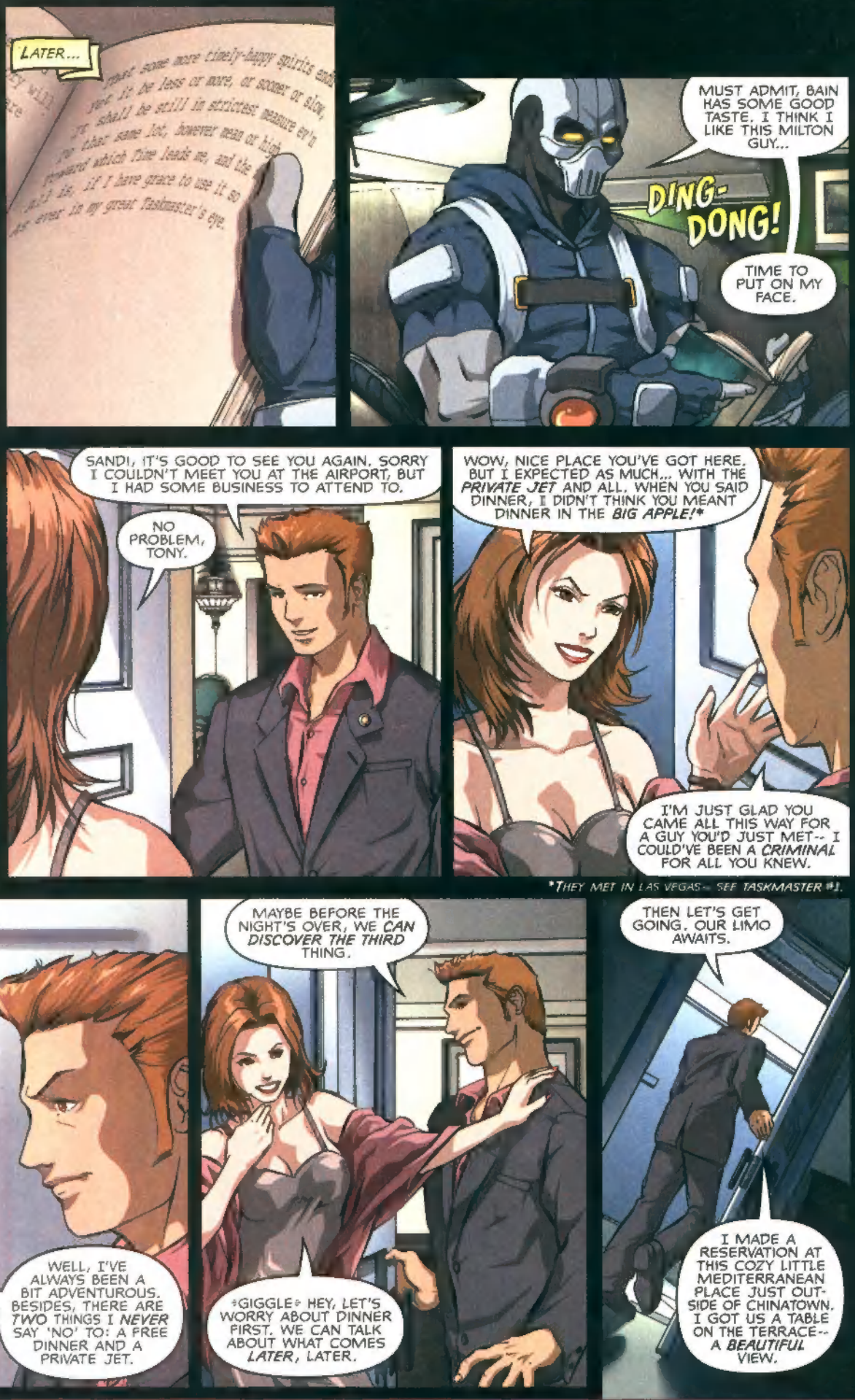
GOOD EVENING, GENTLEMEN, GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT.
I'M SURE YOU'RE ALL AWARE THAT WE'VE BEEN AT ODDS WITH SUNSET BAIN FOR YEARS NOW.
WE'VE DETERMINED THAT SHE WAS BEHIND THE SABOTAGE THE OTHER NIGHT, SO IT'S FINALLY TIME WE SHOWED HER THAT WE'RE NOT AFRAID TO FIGHT BACK.*
*SEE TASKMASTER #1.
WE'VE DISCOVERED THE LOCATION OF ONE OF BAIN'S MONEY LAUNDERING OPERATIONS.
THIS PARTICULAR SITE IS KEY, MOVING MILLIONS IN COLD CASH EVERY DAY. IF WE HIT IT TONIGHT, THERE WILL BE OVER 20 MILLION--
WAIT!
THIS IS CRAZY! BAIN MAY [redacted] OUR ENEMY, BUT SHE'S NOT STUPID! SHE'LL RETALIATE AND WE'LL HAVE A FULL BLOWN WAR ON OUR HANDS! THIS IS A MISTAKE, KONG!
WELL, THEN I'LL GO BACK TO UNCLE LO AND TELL HIM YOU THINK SO, BENNY.
W-WAIT... UNCLE LO?
YES, DIRECT ORDERS. DO YOU WANT TO CHALLENGE THEM?
...
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT. THEN IT'S SETTLED...

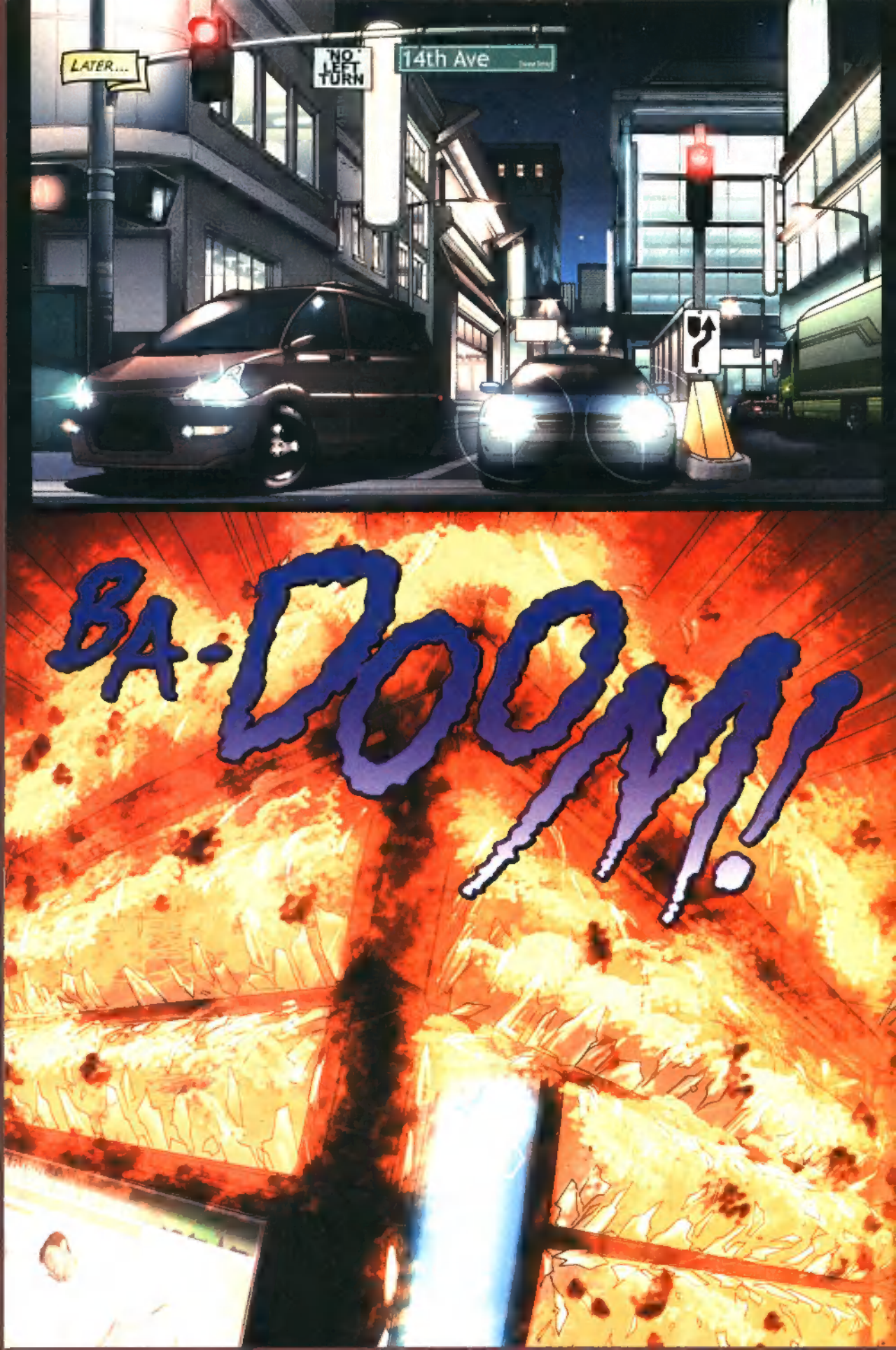
"...WE MOVE TONIGHT.
VRRRRR
500
X100
1 2 3 4 5
100
BRAK-KOOM!

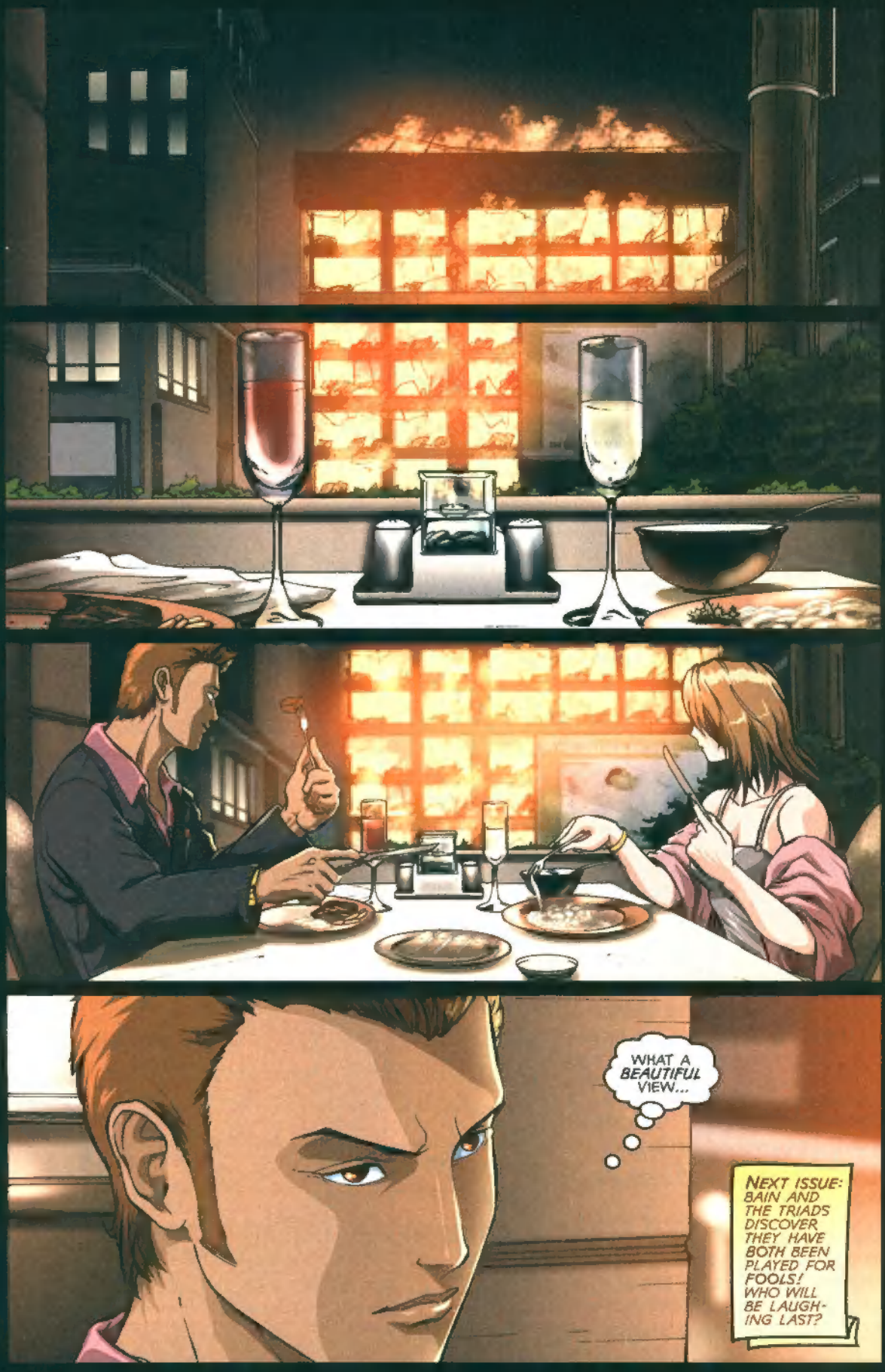
BLAM!
DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING... WHO YOU'RE SCREWING WITH?! YOU'RE MAKING A HUGE MISTAKE, YOU BIG IDIOT!
THIS PLACE WILL BE SWARMING WITH BAIN'S MEN ANY SECOND! YOU'LL LEAVE NOW IF YOU WANT TO LIVE!
WE ALREADY CUT OFF COMMUNICATIONS. NO ONE'S COMING.
I KNOW.
BLAM!

THE NEXT MORNING.
"20 OFFICERS SLAIN IN DRUG BUST GONE BAD." DISAPPOINTING, TO SAY THE LEAST, Mr. ISLEY...
HAS TASKMASTER'S BODY BEEN FOUND YET?
I DO NOT LIKE LOOSE ENDS.
THEY'RE STILL IDENTIFYING THE BODIES. IT WAS A RATHER... MESSY EXPLOSION.
IN ANY E, THERE ARE RE PRESSING MATTERS.
CONCERNING?
THE TRIADS, LAST NIGHT THEY...
I WOULD NOT BE TOO CONCERNED WITH HIM, BUT I WILL HAVE OUR MEN ON ALERT AS A PRECAUTION.
SKRASH!

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO, Ms. BAIN?
CALL A MEETING.
"IF THOSE PIGHEADED CHINESE *PUNKS* WANT A WAR, BY GOD, WE'LL *GIVE* IT TO THEM!"
I WANT THE FOLLOWING TARGETS BURNED TO THE GROUND BEFORE SUNRISE TOMORROW...


LATER...
MUST ADMIT, BAIN HAS SOME GOOD TASTE. I THINK I LIKE THIS MILTON GUY...
DING-DONG!
TIME TO PUT ON MY FACE.
SANDI, IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN. SORRY I COULDN'T MEET YOU AT THE AIRPORT, BUT I HAD SOME BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO.
NO PROBLEM, TONY.
WOW, NICE PLACE YOU'VE GOT HERE. BUT I EXPECTED AS MUCH... WITH THE PRIVATE JET AND ALL. WHEN YOU SAID DINNER, I DIDN'T THINK YOU MEANT DINNER IN THE BIG APPLE!*
I'M JUST GLAD YOU CAME ALL THIS WAY FOR A GUY YOU'D JUST MET-- I COULD'VE BEEN A CRIMINAL FOR ALL YOU KNEW.
*THEY MET IN LAS VEGAS-- SEE TASKMASTER #1.
WELL, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A BIT ADVENTUROUS. BESIDES, THERE ARE TWO THINGS I NEVER SAY 'NO' TO: A FREE DINNER AND A PRIVATE JET.
MAYBE BEFORE THE NIGHT'S OVER, WE CAN DISCOVER THE THIRD THING.
GIGGLE HEY, LET'S WORRY ABOUT DINNER FIRST. WE CAN TALK ABOUT WHAT COMES LATER, LATER.
THEN LET'S GET GOING. OUR LIMO AWAITS.
I MADE A RESERVATION AT THIS COZY LITTLE MEDITERRANEAN PLACE JUST OUTSIDE OF CHINATOWN. I GOT US A TABLE ON THE TERRACE-- A BEAUTIFUL VIEW.


LATER...
"NO" LEFT TURN
14th Ave
BA-DOOM!


WHAT A BEAUTIFUL VIEW...
NEXT ISSUE: BAIN AND THE TRIADS DISCOVER THEY HAVE BOTH BEEN PLAYED FOR FOOLS! WHO WILL BE LAUGHING LAST?